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THE BOOKS OF LYDIA LANGUISH'S CIRCULATING
LIBRARY.

A COMMUNICATION to the London *Morning Post*, of February 3, 1775, begins with these words: 'Mr. Editor, I desire you will inform the Author of the *Rivals* that his attack upon *Circulating Libraries* in his first act is unjust, and very impertinent: Besides his sentiments are so inconsistent—He pretends to make such fine speeches in his play about *love*, and to pay such a compliment in the Epilogue to the Ladies, yet would decry novels, which form the very food and sustenance of love. I should be glad to know what are most of the modern comedies but *dialogue novels*? Are the two Play-houses better than circulating libraries?' The 'malicious scene' which 'Sukey Saunter' thereupon calls on Sheridan to 'expunge' is the second scene of the first act. Somewhat covertly in the dialogue between *Lydia Languish* and *Lucy*, more openly in *Sir Anthony's* denunciation of the circulating library as 'an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge,' Sheridan hits at the sentimentality of the day, especially as represented by the popular novels of the circulating library. *Lydia Languish* who 'projected one of the most sentimental elopements!—so becoming a disguise!—so amiable a ladder of ropes!—Conscious Moon—four horses—Scotch parson—with such surprise to Mrs. Malaprop—and such paragraphs in the newspapers!' is, after all, the product of the sentimental novels of the circulating library which have become to her 'very food and sustenance.'

Thorough appreciation not merely of Sheridan's text, but of his whole attitude toward the spirit of sentimentality run riot in drama and fiction alike, demands an account of the books of

Lydia Languish's circulating library. The very few editions of Sheridan that contain any notes whatever explanatory of the text, present only incomplete and inaccurate accounts of some of the books mentioned by Sheridan.¹ Twenty books, in all, are named in *The Rivals: The Reward of Constancy; The Fatal Connexion; The Mistakes of the Heart; The Delicate Distress; The Memoirs of Lady Woodford; The Gordian Knot; Peregrine Pickle; The Tears of Sensibility; Humphry Clinker; The Memoirs of a Lady of Quality written by herself; The Sentimental Journey; The Whole Duty of Man; Roderick Random; The Innocent Adultery; Lord Aimworth; Ovid; The Man of Feeling; Mrs. Chapone; Fordyce's Sermons; and Lord Chesterfield's Letters.*

The following analysis, based solely upon contemporary book-notices and reviews in English periodicals, is intentionally confined to the books never previously located, those located incorrectly by previous commentators on Sheridan, and a few unfamiliar books about which new material from contemporary sources can be profitably supplied. Smollett, Sterne, Mackenzie, and Lord Chesterfield can be located readily in the manuals of literature, but most of the sentimental novels of the day have been obscured so effectually that the contention is not infrequent that Sheridan coined many of the extravagant titles mentioned in his list. Contemporary evidence, however, proves indisputably that this was not the case. The subjoined extracts from various reviews not merely prove the facts of the case, but give instructive side-lights on the conflict between sentiment and sentimentality.

The Reward of Constancy.

This is the only book mentioned by Sheridan that I have been unable to locate positively. My conjecture is that Sheridan had in mind the sub-title of *The Happy Pair; or, Virtue and Constancy Rewarded.* A Novel. By Mr. Shebbeare [no-

¹ Cf. e. g., Sheridan's *Comedies*, ed. Brander Matthews (Osgood & Co., 1885), notes, pp. 320-321; *The Rivals*, Temple Edition, notes by G. A. Aitken, p. 168.

ticed in the Supplement to *The Universal Magazine*, Jan.-June, 1771]. In support of this conjecture it may be pardonable to quote from a recent personal letter from Mr. W. Fraser Rae of London, the greatest authority on Sheridan: 'I have applied to many friends, of great bibliographical learning, to help me to reply to you. The general opinion is that your guess is correct and that the work in question was *The Happy Pair; or Virtue and Constancy Rewarded*.' Since, however, Sheridan's other titles can be located definitely, this suggestion is offered only as a reasonable conjecture.

The Fatal Connexion.

The Fatal Connexion (1773), by Mrs. Fogerty.

'Surely Mrs. Fogerty was begotten, born, nursed, and educated in a circulating library, and sucked in the spirit of romance with her mother's milk.'—*The Monthly Review*, August, 1773.

'Romantic nonsense, as usual.'—*The London Magazine*, September, 1773.

'Whether Mrs. Fogerty is a real or a fictitious personage, is of no sort of consequence to the public; of less consequence is the production under her name, which has very little to recommend it to their attention.'—*The Critical Review*, November, 1773.

The Mistakes of the Heart.

The Mistakes of the Heart; or, Memoirs of Lady Caroline Pelham and Lady Victoria Nevil. By Treysac de Vergy, Counsellor in the Parliaments of Paris and Bourdeaux. 3 vols. (1769).

'This writer imitates Rousseau and Richardson. His performance is not without merit, and we might commend it to the ladies if there were not some scenes too luxuriant for the eye of delicacy.'—*The Town and Country Magazine*, April, 1769.

'These memoirs are related in a collection of letters, in the manner of Richardson, to whom this writer is very inferior in

point of language, manners, and sentiment.'—*The Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1769.

'If Monsieur de Vergy had ever been really acquainted with persons of distinction in this country, he could not have so egregiously mistaken their style and manner The *mistakes of the pen*, however, may be pardoned in a foreigner, although we are quite wearied with their perpetual repetition,—and the frequent instances of broken English into the bargain.'—*The Monthly Review*, February, 1772 (on vol. 4).

The Delicate Distress and The Gordian Knot.

The Delicate Distress and The Gordian Knot. 1769. Two Novels, in Letters. By the Authors of Henry and Frances. In Four Volumes. The first and second, entitled, *The Delicate Distress*, by Frances; the third and fourth, entitled, *The Gordian Knot* or, *Dignus Vindice Nodus*, by Henry.

'In *The Delicate Distress*, Mrs. Griffith, whose productions we have occasionally recommended to the public, has told us an interesting tale, embellished with an agreeable variety of characters.

'In *The Gordian Knot*, Mr. G., under the assumed name of Henry, gives us, as his title-page may seem to import, a more complicated and more elaborate, but less sprightly and less pleasing history.'—*The Monthly Review*, September, 1769.

The Memoirs of Lady Woodford.

The Memoirs of Lady Woodford, written by herself, and addressed to a Friend.

'Tenderness and simplicity are the principal characteristics of this innocent novel.'—*The Monthly Review*, June, 1771.

The Tears of Sensibility.

The Tears of Sensibility, Novels. Namely, 1. The cruel Father. 2. Rosetta. 3. The rival Friends. 4. Sidney and Silli. Translated from the French of M. D'Arnaud, by John Murdoch, 2 vols.

'These novels are highly interesting, and written with senti-

ment and delicacy. The translator has done them ample justice: His version is elegant, and discovers a rare propriety of expression and language.'—*The Universal Magazine*, January, 1773.

'In this work, as is usual to the French novelists, nature is painted very warmly but chastely. The translation has preserved the spirit of the original.'—*The London Magazine*, January, 1773.

'Amongst the various translations which we have read of this kind from the works of our ingenious neighbours, we recollect scarcely any which can come in competition with these productions of M. D'Arnaud . . . We should be better pleased were not some of the incidents beyond the reach of probability.'—*The Critical Review*, March, 1773.

'The Author aims, for the most part, to keep his Readers on the rack. He deals only in those virtues and vices which astonish and exercise our sensibility in the extreme. He therefore defeats his own purpose. A tale made up wholly of wonders, never excites admiration; and a novel, which in every page is to harrow up the soul, leaves it in great quietness.'—*The Monthly Review*, April, 1773.

The Whole Duty of Man.

'*The Whole Duty of Man*, necessary for all families, with private devotions for severall occasions. [By Lady Pakington? or R. Sterne, Archbishop of York? With a prefatory letter by H. Hammond.] 2 pt. *London*, [December? 1658–] 1660.' So entered in the catalogue of the British Museum. This once famous religious work had almost a score of editions during the century after its first publication. It has been ascribed conjecturally to a great variety of authors. It is highly probable that Sheridan's allusion to it may have been prompted by the publication of a new and revised edition, extensively advertised before the production of *The Rivals*. In *The Universal Magazine*, February, 1773, for example, after a full prospectus of the work appears this explanatory note: 'It being now upwards of

100 years since the publication of the *Old Whole Duty of Man*, it need not be matter of surprise if the generality of readers begin to be little affected by that work. I have endeavoured to supply all these deficiencies of the *Old Whole Duty of Man*, by furnishing the age we live in with a *Duty of Man* much better adapted to the Christian religion, and the occasions of the present time.'

The Innocent Adultery.

This thoroughly indecent romance was a translation of Paul Scarron's *L'Adultère Innocente*. The British Museum has an edition of 1722. The Yale University Library contains an edition of 1729, which I have read: '*The Innocent Adultery*. Translated from the French Original of Monsieur Scarron. London: MDCCXXIX.' (Included in vol. 4 of *A Select Collection of Novels and Histories*. London, 1729.) The British Museum has several early eighteenth century editions of *The Whole Comical Works of Monsr Scarron* (including 'All his novels and histories'). Scarron's work was well known in English translations.

Mr. Brander Matthews has asserted (*Sheridan's Comedies*, p. 321) that '*The Innocent Adultery* was the second title of Southerne's tragedy, the *Fatal Marriage*, revived as *Isabella; or, the Fatal Marriage* for Mrs. Siddons, after Sheridan became manager of Drury Lane theatre.' Mr. G. A. Aitken, Temple Edition of *The Rivals*, adopts this explanation without question. In the first place, the context of the play itself is a strong presumption against this theory, for many other novels, including translations from the French, are mentioned, but no other plays. Very definite proof, however, may be had. Briefly condensed, the essential facts are these. *The Fatal Marriage; or, The Innocent Adultery* was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1694 (Genest 2. 56.) It was revived at Drury Lane in 1757.

'Dec. 2.—On this evening will be revived a Tragedy called the *Fatal Marriage*, altered from Southerne. . . . Garrick omitted the comic under-plot' [Genest 4. 511.]

The printed version of the play reads '*Isabella ; or, The Fatal Marriage*. A play. Alter'd from Southern (by David Garrick). London, 1757.'

Numerous references can be given showing that the version known in Sheridan's day, both on the stage and in the library, was Garrick's revision (1757), which dropped entirely Southerne's old sub-title. March 31, 1770—Covent Garden, 'Mrs. Bellamy's bt. [*i. e.*, "benefit"]. Never acted there [that is, as altered by Garrick] *Isabella*' (Genest 5. 286). November 25, 1774—Drury Lane. 'Acted but once these 14 years, *Isabella*' [Genest 5. 443].

I have been utterly unable to find any reference during Sheridan's day to Southerne's play by its original sub-title, *The Innocent Adultery*. It is doubtful if Sheridan knew any version save Garrick's; it is certain that theatre-goers in 1775 could not have understood a recondite allusion to a discarded sub-title of a play known to them in Garrick's revision (1757), and regularly called *Isabella*.

It may be added that Mrs. Siddons' appearance in *Isabella*, alluded to by Mr. Brander Matthews above, was not until October 10, 1782 (according to Genest 6. 251), twenty-five years after Garrick's revival of Southerne's play, and the revision of the title, both on the stage and in the printed edition of the play, to *Isabella ; or, The Fatal Marriage*. The proofs here given have been necessitated by the fact that the mistake has seemingly passed unchallenged.

Lord Aimworth.

The History of Lord Aimsworth, and the honourable Charles Hartford, Esq.; in a series of letters. A novel in three vols. by the author of *Dorinda Catsby* and *Ermina*, or the fair recluse.—*The Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1773.

In a quaint foot-note, however, to *The Rivals*, included in the *British Theatre* (Leipsic, 1828, p. 654), occurs this clause: 'Lord Aimworth (see *Maid of the Mill*) has debased himself by a *mésalliance*.' *The Maid of the Mill*, a comic opera, by

Isaac Bickerstaffe, acted at Covent Garden Theatre in 1765, contains the character, *Lord Aimworth*. The only possible point in favor of this explanation is the spelling *Aimworth*, while the reference from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1773, has *Aimsworth*. The context, the date of the novel, its title, and the improbability that the opera would be mentioned by the name of one of its characters instead of by its real title, are some of many reasons for belief that Sheridan refers to the novel. Finally, in the *General Index to Fifty-six Volumes of the Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1818), the above-quoted book-notice is catalogued (2. 237) with the spelling *Aimworth*, presumably a correction of the error.

Mrs. Chapone.

Letters on the Improvement of the Mind. Addressed to a young Lady. 2 vols. 1773. [by Mrs. Chapone].

'These letters are ten in number, 1. On the first principles of religion. 2 and 3. On the study of the Holy Scriptures. 4 and 5. On the regulation of the heart and affections: these are contained in the first volume—Letter 6. On the government of the temper. 7. On œconomy. 8. On politeness and accomplishments. 9. On geography and chronology. 10. On the manner, and course of reading history, with the conclusion, make up the second. They are addressed from an aunt to her niece, (a young lady in the 15th year of her age) for whose use the letters seem originally to have been written. The language is the language of the heart; and the instructions are conveyed in so kind and engaging a manner, that they cannot fail of being extensively useful.'—*The Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1773.

Fordyce's Sermons.

Sermons to Young Women. 2 vols. 1765. By James Fordyce.

(Fordyce was a popular Presbyterian divine (1720–1796), whose popularity was waning, however, at the time of *The Rivals*).

‘There are indeed, to the best of our recollection, no compositions of this kind in the English language, in which are to be found greater delicacy of sentiment, correctness of imagination, elegance of taste, or that contain such genuine pictures of life and manners.’—*The Monthly Review*, June, 1766.

In brief review of the sentimental novels of *Lydia Languish's* circulating library, and of the eminently respectable works which she hastily substituted for them, may be quoted these sentences from *The Monthly Review*, July, 1773, in the criticism there given of Mrs. Chapone's *Letters*: ‘This is a sensible, pleasing performance, happily adapted to improve the minds and form the manners of those young persons who will attentively peruse it. In our opinion, these letters have a tendency to do them much more essential service than the general run of novels and romances; although it is confessed that in some of the latter there is excellent morality, united with the most lively pictures of the human mind, and with all that can entertain the imagination and interest the head. Yet most of them, as this writer observes, are calculated to inflame the passions of youth, while the chief purpose of education should be to moderate them. The writing, and the sentiments of these *fictitious stories*, it is here farther remarked, often tend to vitiate the stile, and to mislead the understanding. The expectation of extraordinary adventures,—which seldom if ever happened to the sober and prudent part of mankind,—and the admiration of extravagant passions and absurd conduct, are some of the usual fruits of this kind of reading:—which, adds our Authoress, (for we are informed this is a lady's production) when a young woman makes it her chief amusement, generally renders her ridiculous in conversation, and miserably wrong-headed in her pursuits and behaviour.’ Broadly speaking, these abstract truths of the reviewer have concrete presentation in Sheridan's *Lydia Languish*, who finds ‘her chief amusement’ in the books of the circulating library.

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